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Back to Smersh

Something deplorable is happening to the spy business.

The rash of books was bad enough. There were those intimate details of the snooping craft provided by our own superspy, Allen Dulles. And then came that gossipy little work by Kim Philby, all about how he double-crossed the British and American intelligence apparatus for the benefit of the Soviets.

But now the Russians have gone too far. The big current movie hit of Moscow is a spy thriller called "The Dead Season," which is an arresting title. And the subject has shown itself to be, as Variety might say, boffo at the B. O. The trouble is that the Russians have cast a real spy—Col. Rudolf Abel—in the opus. And they have followed, almost to the letter, the real-life exploits of the Soviet master spy, Gordon Lonsdale.

Now that's just not right. A few years

ago, the Russians knew how the game should be played. They insisted, every time the subject came up, that the Soviet Union had no intelligence organization at all or ever spied on anybody. But now, in the new movie there is even a brief scene in the central communications room, with messages from agents pouring in from around the world.

Both of the superpowers seem intent on making the business of spying respectable. And that is clearly a big mistake. What's the point of taking a chance on a long prison term or maybe the firing squad for a job that's no more bizarre than selling used cars or writing editorials? Imagine what will happen to the recruiting programs at the CIA and the opposition if the image of humdrum respectability ever really gets across.

If Russia and the United States know what's good for them, they'll get back to Smersh and James Bond just as fast as they can.

MORI/CDF